

Friday – January 12, 2018

Senator Chas V. Vincent  
Chair  
Environmental Quality Council  
Legislative Environmental Policy Office  
State Capitol Building  
1301 E. 6th Ave., Room 171  
P.O. Box 201704

Re: Written public comment in preparation and response to the Environmental Quality Council agenda item for Thursday – January 18, 2018 pertaining to Fire Related Study topics and the comparison of fire funding in other states report prepared by Leanne Kurtz, Research Analyst, Montana Legislative Services Division, Office of Research and Policy Analysis.

Dear: Senator Chas V. Vincent, Chair and Members of the Environmental Quality Council (EQC)  
Interim Committee

I am submitting written public comments regarding the agenda item that will be discussed at the EQC Interim Committee meeting scheduled for Thursday – January 18, 2018 on the Fire Related Study and the comparison of fire funding.

I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude to the work that was completed by Leanne Kurtz, Research Analyst, Office of Research and Policy Analysis, dated January 2018 entitled a Summary of University of Idaho Report: State Funding for Wildfire Suppression in the western U.S., August 2017.

I have followed the work over the years of the Interim Fire Suppression Committee, fire suppression funding legislation, the recent decision by the special legislative session last fall to address the fire suppression funding for the state and the proposed legislation under House Bill 4 in the 2017 Special Session, along with the recent news article yesterday on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) denial of an additional \$44 million dollars for this past summer for wildfire suppression cost incurred for the State of Montana.

My interest on the direction the EQC next steps for the respective study on the fire related study topics is very much supported based on the fact my family ranching operation located 25 miles Northwest of Helena, has private classified forested acreage in which it has been paying for over 40 years to support the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), formerly the Department of State Lands (DSL) regarding direct protection and affidavit protection for pre-suppression funding, along with the support of the State County Cooperative Program.

The family ranching operation not only supports the DNRC with the classified forested acreage, but is also assessed through property taxes, to support the Canyon Creek Rural Fire District operations since the early 1950's. This type of wildland fire protection is the best a private landowner can receive regarding wildland fire protection for both pre-suppression funding for DNRC, the response of the Canyon Creek Rural Fire District, along with the program benefits that local community and the private landowner benefits through the State County Cooperative Program in providing training for the volunteer firefighters, equipment and assistance for wildland fire suppression.

The proposed legislation under House Bill 4, during the 2017 Fall Special Session, that was not acted on, sponsored by Senator Chas V. Vincent, was a start to address the overall Statewide funding issue for DNRC, needs to have more private landowner stakeholder involvement and support if any legislation is to be proposed for the 2019 Legislative session.

**Recommendations to the EQC as a private citizen and interest on the respective subject matter:**

1. I have not been able to see any study on the actual breakdown of the total number of rural fire districts, fire service fee areas and volunteer fire departments within the state of Montana and the amount of revenue that is collected through fees and/or property tax assessments. I feel getting this information will be helpful on how much the taxpayers are paying through fees and/or property tax assessments to establish some baseline data within the State of Montana.
2. Private landowner stakeholder input and interest who are affected by the current fire protection assessment, along with assessments of the fire protection with DNRC, and a local rural fire district, fire service fee area or volunteer fire department, and those property owners in Eastern Montana in getting their perspective on what is working or not, etc. to provide input to help any future legislation like that proposed under House Bill 4, from the EQC and the upcoming 2019 Legislative session.
3. The handout prepared entitled "Legislator's frequently asked questions about the fire protection assessment" is also very helpful to a private landowner stakeholder.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide written public comment on the respective fire related study topics for the upcoming EQC meeting scheduled for January 17-18, 2018.

Sincerely

*Richard E. Grady*

(Electronic Signature)

Richard E. Grady  
P.O Box 547  
Canyon Creek, MT 59633  
[gradybunch@lincnet.net](mailto:gradybunch@lincnet.net)  
Home: 406-368-2308  
Cell: 406-202-3577

Cc: Leanne Kurtz - Research Analyst